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Marion D. Ellis

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, mellis3@unl.edu

Frederick P. Baxendale

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, fbaxendale1@unl.edu

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Getting Started in Beekeeping

This NebGuide provides information on beginning beekeeping in Nebraska.

Marion D. Ellis, Nebraska State Apiarist
Frederick P. Baxendale, Extension Entomology Specialist

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Beekeeping in Nebraska

There are approximately 700 beekeepers in Nebraska operating about 115,000 colonies of bees. Annual honey production in the state ranges from 5 to 11 million pounds depending on weather conditions and available flora. The honey from each area is a unique blend of nectars from the available flora. In a good area under favorable conditions, a properly managed colony can produce 100 pounds or more of honey. The six-year average (1986-1991) for honey production per colony in Nebraska is 75 pounds.

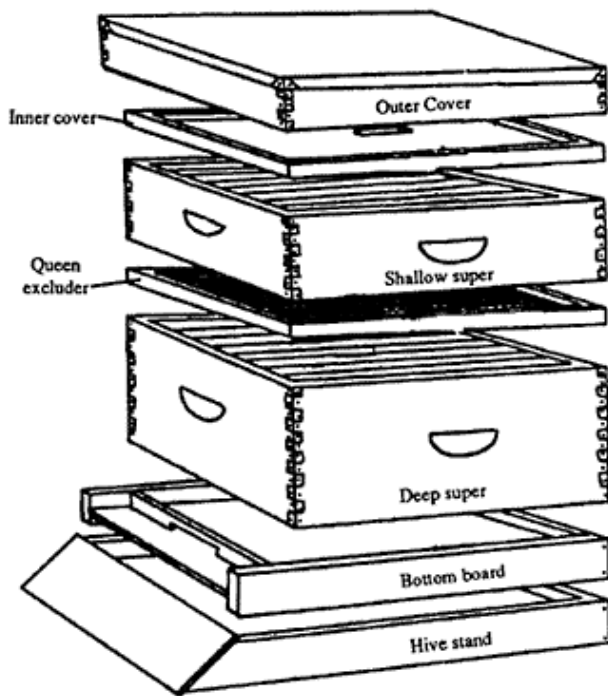
Of far greater importance is the role honey bees play as pollinators of fruit, vegetable, and seed crops. In addition to farm and garden crops, honey bees pollinate many plants important to wildlife and soil conservation, and many of the wildflowers that beautify our landscape. Some of the Nebraska crops requiring bee pollination are: alfalfa seed, clover seed, vetch seed, sunflowers, canola, watermelons, cantaloupes, squash, pumpkins, cucumbers, apples, cherries, pears, and raspberries. Beekeepers provide a valuable resource since these crops cannot be produced without bee pollination.

How Do I Begin?

The following suggestions will help you avoid many common problems and get your beekeeping enterprise off to a good start. Remember, you can only learn to be a beekeeper by keeping bees, so be patient and enjoy your lessons. Honey bees have had hundreds of years of experience in training new beekeepers.

1. Prepare yourself by reading about bees (see suggested titles).
2. Get to know other beekeepers and attend association meetings.
3. Begin small. Two to four colonies are ideal for new beekeepers.
4. Begin right. Start with new equipment and package bees.
5. Grow slowly. Successful beekeeping requires skills you can only learn by keeping bees.

Getting Ready -- Bees and Equipment



Elements of a beehive

For the beginner who is just starting with bees, buying all new equipment with package bees is the best way to start. An established hive can create problems for the beginner in areas such as swarm control, requeening, and colony defensiveness. Buying new equipment will allow you to learn the individual parts of the hive while putting it together, and with package bees you can gain valuable experience from manipulating a small colony. You will witness the colony's growth from a small package into a strong honey producing colony. This way your beekeeping skills will grow as your colony grows. Starting with more than one colony is helpful and will give you more management options. Two to four colonies are ideal for new beekeepers.

Buy your first bees and equipment from a well recognized source. Refer to advertisements in beekeeping journals and request catalogs from the suppliers listed at the end of this publication. Before you buy used equipment, familiarize yourself with honey bee diseases and pests. Second hand equipment may be safe; or it may turn out to be a costly and discouraging investment. Always request a health

certificate issued by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture before buying established colonies or used equipment. This is for your protection. The seller is required by law to furnish this certificate. Natural swarms, removing bees from bee trees or old buildings, and buying established hives are all good ways to obtain bees after you have gained some experience handling bees and are familiar with bee diseases, colony management, and other problems you may encounter.

Getting Ready -- Yourself

Outfit yourself with work clothes and needed accessories to make your work easier and more enjoyable. When working with bees, always use a bee smoker and a hive tool. Learning to use these tools properly is an important skill for the beginning beekeeper to master. You should be able to light your smoker and keep it burning before you attempt to open a colony. Never attempt to open a colony without having a smoker burning. With a well-lit smoker, you are in charge; without it, the bees may take control.

Attend short courses, field days, and beekeeping association meetings. Subscribe to at least one beekeeping periodical. If you have friends who keep bees, go with them when they work with their bees. This experience will prove very helpful when you get your own bees.

When you begin working with bees, always wear bee gloves and a veil. As you become more aware of the factors that affect a colony's temperament, you will learn when you can work with your bees without gloves and when the colony will be quite defensive. You will only learn these lessons through experience working your bees, so be well protected. Before attempting to open a colony, carefully study information on how to handle bees when opening the hive.

People react to bee stings in different ways. Most people become accustomed to bee venom with time and tolerate occasional bee stings with little reaction. Unfortunately, a small fraction of the total human population can be dangerously allergic and have a life-threatening reaction. Generalized reactions, where

symptoms occur away from the site of the sting, indicate a dangerous sensitivity. These symptoms include difficulty in breathing, swelling away from the site of the sting, itching and hives, nausea or abdominal cramps, dizziness, and confusion. If any of these symptoms occur, the beekeeper should seek immediate medical attention. Allergic reactions can be stopped by administering epinephrine. Allergic individuals can be desensitized in most cases and should consult their physician.

Getting Ready -- Cost

The equipment needed to manage a single bee colony will cost between \$100 and \$125. Stick to basic needs initially. You will need two deep brood chambers with frames and foundation, a lid, and a bottom board to house your colony. You also will need two or three shallow supers with frames and foundation for surplus honey storage and the protective equipment described earlier. By producing cut comb honey initially, the only processing equipment you will need is a pocket knife. Package bees will cost you about \$35 a package (including shipping) and should be ordered several months before you want them to arrive. Order package bees to arrive between April 15 and May 1 to allow them enough time to build up before the main honey flow. Package bees are sold by the pound; a three-pound package is a good choice for new beekeepers.

Sources of Information

Books, Handbooks, and Manuals

- ABC and XYZ of Bee Culture*,
A.I. Root Company, 623 W. Liberty St., Medina, OH 44256.
- American Honey Plants*,
F.C. Pellet, Dadant and Sons, Inc., Hamilton, IL, 1976.
- Beekeeping in the United States*,
USDA Ag Handbook #335, Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office,
Washington, D.C. 20402.
- Contemporary Queen Rearing*,
H. Laidlaw Jr., Dadant and Sons, Inc., Hamilton, IL, 1979.
- First Lessons in Beekeeping*,
C.P. Dadant, Dadant and Sons, Inc., Hamilton, IL, 1976.
- Honey: A Comprehensive Survey*,
E. Crane, International Bee Research Association, Morrison and Gibb Ltd., London, England, 1975.
- Honey Bee Pests, Predators, and Diseases*,
R.A. Morse, ed., Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1984.
- Honey in the Comb*,
E. Killion, Dadant and Sons, Inc., Hamilton, IL, 1981.
- How to Keep Bees and Sell Honey*,
Walter T. Kelley, Walter T. Kelley Co., Clarkson, KY, 1991.
- Insect Pollination of Cultivated Crop Plants*,
USDA Handbook #496, Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington,
D.C., 1976.
- Starting Right With Bees*,
A.I. Root Company, Medina, OH, 1988.
- The Hive and the Honey Bee*,
edited by Dadant and Sons, Dadant and Sons, Inc., Hamilton, IL, 1991.
- The Biology of the Honey Bee*,
Mark Winston, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1987.

Many libraries may have one or more of these publications, locally or through the statewide library network. Your county extension agent also may have bulletins available on specific aspects of beekeeping. The books listed above can also be ordered from the sources listed.

Periodicals

American Bee Journal,

51 S. Second St., Hamilton, IL 62341. Monthly, write for subscription information and sample copy.

Gleanings in Bee Culture,

P.O. Box 706, Medina, OH 44256. Monthly, write for subscription information and sample copy.

The Speedy Bee,

P.O. Box 998, Jesup, GA 31545. Monthly, write for subscription information and sample copy.

Nebraska Beekeeping Organizations

Nebraska Honey Producers Association.

Statewide, five newsletters a year, two annual meetings (in July and two-day business meeting with speakers in November); dues \$10. For membership application and sample newsletter write to Carol Kuehl, secretary, Box 220, Loup City, NE 68853.

Eastern Nebraska Beekeepers Association.

Eastern Nebraska, 10 newsletters per year, meets monthly except during the summer, sponsors annual field day; dues \$5. Meetings are held the second Saturday of each month beginning at 9 a.m. Meetings are held in the chapel of Sapp Brothers truck stop at the Interstate 80 - Highway 50 interchange just west of Omaha. For membership application and a sample newsletter write Jerry Bishop, president, 311 W. 28th Avenue, Bellevue, NE 68005.

There are many other areas where beekeepers get together but no formal organization exists. If you are interested in organizing a beekeeping club in your area, contact your local extension office. A good way to start a club is to have a beekeeping short course. Your county agent can help you organize a program and get your club started.

National Beekeeping Organizations

American Beekeeping Federation, Inc.

P.O. Box 1038, Jesup, GA 31545. Newsletter, annual meeting with speakers, sponsors American Honey Queen and National Honey Show; dues \$20. Write for a sample newsletter and membership application.

American Honey Producer's Association,

P.O. Box 817-L Cheshire, CT 06410. Newsletter, annual meeting with speakers; dues \$20. Write for a sample newsletter and membership application.

Beekeeping Supplies and Equipment

A.I. Root Company, P.O. Box 706, Medina, OH 44256.

Dadant and Sons, 1318 11th Street, Sioux City, IA 51102.

Draper's Superbee, Route 3, Auburn, NE 68305.

Walter T. Kelley Company, Clarkson, KY 42726.

Mann Lake Supply Company, First & 40, Hackensack, MN 56452.

Some supply companies have local distributors. Contact the parent company for the names and addresses of local suppliers.

For sources of package bees and queens and additional bee supply dealers, consult current issues of beekeeping journals.

Apiary Inspection, Beekeeping Information, Nebraska State Fair

Beekeepers are required to register the location of their colonies with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. For apiary inspection, disease diagnosis, and laws relating to the sale and movement of colonies, contact: State Apiarist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 94756, Lincoln, NE 68509, telephone (402) 471-2394.

For further information on beekeeping and advice on beekeeping practices, contact Department of Entomology, Extension Office, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0816, telephone (402) 472-2125.

The Nebraska State Fair has a bee culture exhibit and open class show for honey and beeswax items with over \$850 in prize money and awards. For a list of classes and premiums contact The Nebraska State Fair, State Fair Park, 1800 State Fair Park Drive, Box 81223, Lincoln, NE 68501-1223, telephone (402) 474-5371.

Recipes and Marketing Information

The National Honey Board is supported by a one cent per pound marketing assessment paid by beekeepers who produce 6,000 lbs or more of honey annually. The Board sells many items to help beekeepers market and promote their products, including recipe brochures, posters, aprons, display bins, videotapes, and many more useful items. They have an excellent videotape and workbook for beekeepers who give talks to elementary students. They also have an outstanding cooking demonstration videotape and recipes for use in cooking with honey demonstrations. To obtain a complete list of items, write:

National Honey Board
421 21st Avenue, Suite #203
Longmont, CO 80501
Fax: (303) 776-1177
Phone: (303) 777-2337

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